



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 11708)

Report Type: Consent Calendar

Meeting Date: 11/2/2020

Summary Title: Refer the Development of Permanent Race and Equity Public Art to the Public Art Commission

Title: Refer the Development of Permanent Public Art on King Plaza at City Hall to the Public Art Commission

From: City Manager

Lead Department: City Manager

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the City Council refer to the Public Art Commission the development of a permanent public art installation in King Plaza (City Hall Civic Center) to recognize the City's priorities on race and equity.

Background

On June 8, 2020, the City Council unanimously passed a resolution affirming that Black lives matter and committed the City to addressing systemic racism and bias. This resolution also honored the lives of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others and can be found online in [CMR #11414](#).

In addition to the resolution, the City Council also unanimously directed staff to return with a framework, report on possible improvements to police hiring practices, and a diversity and inclusion initiative throughout the City. In response to that direction, staff returned to the City Council on June 15, 2020 with a draft framework to inform Palo Alto's focus over the short, medium, and long-term ([CMR #11441](#)). The City Council also approved a series of actions including direction to the Public Art Commission to explore public art honoring diversity and work with our community to paint "Black lives matter" or a similar message near City Hall, as soon as possible. The temporary installation was completed in late June.

Discussion

This referral seeks to recognize the City's priorities on race and equity through the potential development of permanent public art in King Plaza at City Hall Civic Center. In June, the Public Art Commission commissioned the installation of a temporary Black lives matter Mural by launching a call for artists. The Public Art Commission hosted panel interviews and selected sixteen diverse, local artists to paint the individual letters in the mural using their own

perspectives on race and equity to guide their work. Since that time, the community has engaged with the temporary mural. In addition, on September 10, 2020, the Public Art Commission hosted a panel discussion with several of the mural artists to engage the community on the topic of race and equity. Watch the virtual [Racial Equity Panel Conversation here](#).

In August, the City Council discussed interest in developing permanent public art in King Plaza at City Hall Civic Center. In September, as a priority for the coming year's workplan, the Public Art Commission approved exploring public art elements at Palo Alto's city limits to reinforce the City's focus on race, equity and inclusion. The recommended motion in this report would add the specific discussion about a permanent public art piece in King Plaza to the Public Art Commission's workplan. With the garage underneath King Plaza, the weight of art installations on the plaza is limited. Permanent artwork will need to be designed consistent with these engineering requirements and traditional sculptural works are likely infeasible at this site.

As the Black lives matter mural was intended to be a temporary installation, the City is currently focused on decommission efforts for the mural. In conversations with the Public Works Department, the City plans to decommission the temporary Black lives matter mural in early November due to the anticipated shift in weather and concerns over public safety and traffic impacts. This allows the City to schedule the road work needed by an experienced crew in advance of seasonal rainy weather. Staff also expects an increase in traffic as more business activities are allowed locally with the relaxing of COVID-19 restrictions set by the State Public Health Officer and Santa Clara County Public Health Officer. The City anticipated decommissioning the temporary mural as early as September 2020 or by the end of the calendar year as the mural faded.

The City Council referral would advance and build upon the temporary mural's impact by directing the Public Art Commission to develop permanent artwork focused on race, equity and inclusion in King Plaza at City Hall Civic Center. This recommendation aligns with the Public Art Commission's priorities to focus on race and equity in their workplan this year.

Resource Impact

With the acceptance of this report, a referral will be submitted to the Public Art Commission to explore a permanent public art installation or a series of installations in King Plaza at City Hall Civic Center. The Public Art Commission will follow the established approval process related to the budget and the art chosen.

Stakeholder Engagement

Since the City Council's adoption of their Race and Equity Framework, a series of community engagement efforts and community conversations have taken place focused on race and equity. For more on the City's focus on race and equity, go to www.cityofpaloalto.org/raceandequity. For more on the City's Public Art program, go to www.cityofpaloalto.org/publicart. For other community engagement completed or underway, including Public Art programming planned, go to the August 24, 2020 City Council Staff Report

[\(CMR #11551 Attachment B\)](#).

Environmental Review

This referral is not a project subject to environmental review. Potential environmental impacts will be considered at the time a proposed permanent artwork is identified.